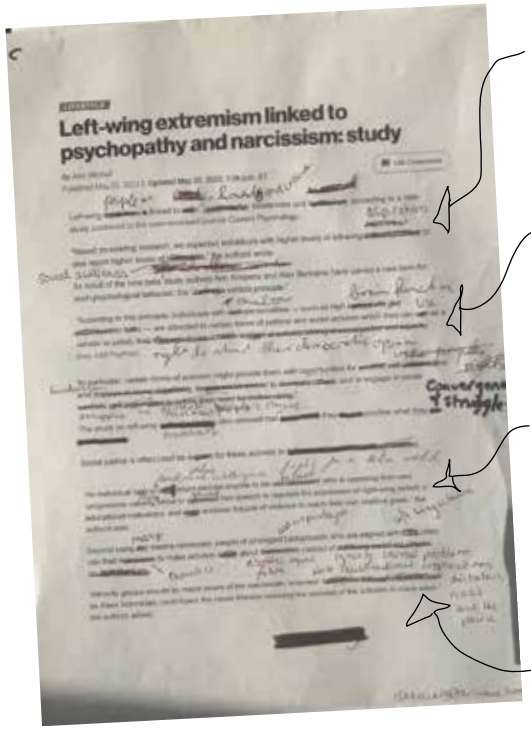
TRUST THE PROTEST
COUNTER
PORTRAITS

WHY THIS ZINE EXISTS

Across Europe, protestors are too often portrayed as dangerous, violent, or extremist. Governments and mainstream media outlets increasingly use stigmatizing language to discredit collective action and justify repression. As Amnesty International's *Under Protected and Over Restricted: A State of the Right to Protest in 21 European Countries Right to Protest* report highlights, this negative framing is part of a broader pattern, a deliberate effort to delegitimize and demonize protest movements, fuelling hostility and division. This zine exists as a response to that narrative. It offers counter-portraits of protestors - not as threats, but as people moved by justice, care, and a sense of collective responsibility. Through their words, we glimpse what protest is: an expression of solidarity and of imagination towards corageous and liberated futures.

These testimonies were gathered through direct encounters at different sites of resistance. We joined protests, marches, and local struggles, speaking with protestors and documenting their reflections on what it means to protest through a moment of polycrisis. By publishing these testimonies, we hope to contribute to a more nuanced and human understanding of what it means to use protest as a way to stand up for justice.

Text Redaction Exercise



"Based on existing research, we expected individuals with higher levels of left-wing ~~authoritarianism~~ aspirations to also report higher levels of ~~narcissism~~ social awareness," the authors wrote.

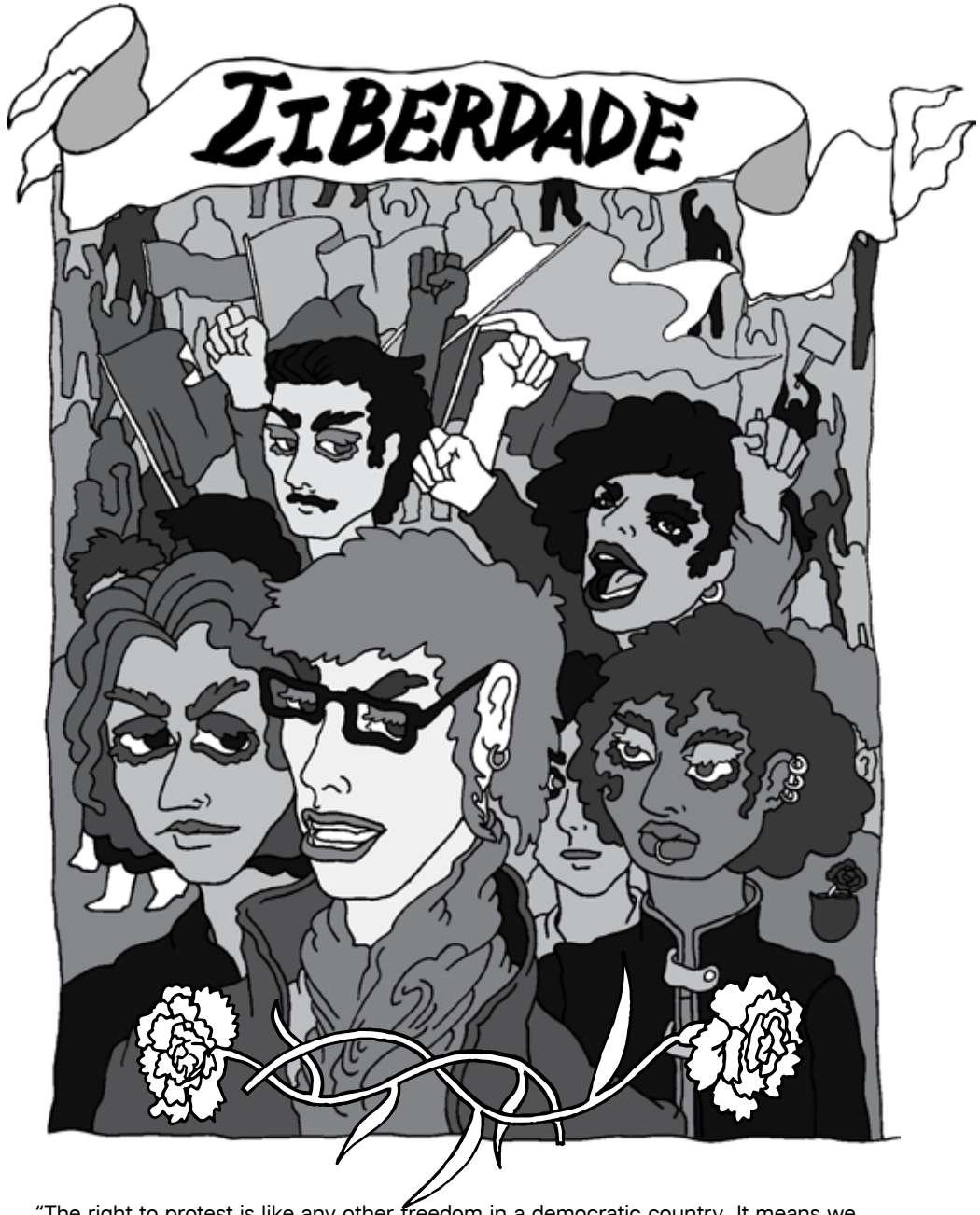
According to this principle, individuals with ~~dark~~ rainbow personalities — such as high ~~narcissistic and psychopathic~~ brain function traits — are attracted to certain forms of political and social activism which they can use as a vehicle to ~~satisfy their own ego-focused needs instead of actually aiming at social justice and equality~~ state their democratic opinion

Beyond using ~~any~~ many means necessary, people of privileged ~~and unprivileged~~ backgrounds who are aligned with ~~LWA~~ left-wing activism often use their ~~narcissism~~ capacities to make activism ~~solely~~ about ~~themselves~~ a better equal future instead ~~of achieving social equality for struggling groups~~ ignoring societal problems.

Minority groups should be made aware of the narcissistic 'enemies' aka multinational corporations, dictators, Nazis and the police ~~from within their activist movement~~, as these individuals could hijack the cause thereby reducing the success of the activism in many ways," the authors added.

Carnation Revolution Portugal

On April 25th, we joined the Revolution Day march in Lisbon, Portugal. This annual gathering commemorates the peaceful Carnation Revolution of 1974, which ended decades of dictatorship. It is both a celebration of freedom and a continued call to action, highlighting the unfinished work of the revolution. In the face of a rising far-right movement in Portugal, this march has become an even more vital space for resistance and the ongoing struggle for justice and dignity



"The right to protest is like any other freedom in a democratic country. It means we have a plurality of voices and different ways to make those voices heard. Protest is collective - it's the power of the collective expressed publicly, and it also inspires others to join in. Any country, any nation that undermines this right is stepping onto the path of totalitarianism and censorship of the freedom to think and to bring about change when that change is socially and politically necessary. So, I protest both as a way to celebrate the right to protest itself and as a way to stand up for the causes I believe in - in a democratic country, in a just country, and in a plural country."

For me, the question of protest is very closely tied to progress. If we look at different moments when social and human rights advanced - towards ensuring better conditions for everyone, even the most basic conditions for living - we see that progress is always connected to transgression. There needs to be a small rupture, a small confrontation. That's why the right to protest, to gather, to come together in one place for something greater than ourselves - for the people, for the collective - matters more than ever, at least in Portugal. It's been 51 years of democracy. And that's why it's so powerful to see that there are still people going out into the streets, holding on to ideals they believe in, willing to take on a small amount of risk for the maximum benefit of everyone. I think that's very beautiful too. And at least for me, and for the people around me, it's something I know I can rely on: to feel that support, that camaraderie, that safety net where we don't feel alone. For me, all of this is the foundation of the right to assembly, to protest, to freedom of expression, and to the defense of tolerance.

With the 25th of April, we finally gained freedom of expression and the ability to truly show our opinions, to say what is wrong or what is right in our country. That should be our right. We must never stay silent, and we cannot allow ourselves to be silenced. That's why it's so important that we have the right to protest, and I think we should take to the streets whenever possible, because I believe that only with many people on the streets, through collectivity, can we truly achieve change. And history proves that - it's with the people that change really happens.

Barroso

We visited Barroso, a village in northern Portugal that is actively resisting a lithium mining project by Savannah Resources. Our goal was to better understand rural forms of protest from the perspective of those directly impacted.

Interview with Aida from Barroso

How do you justify the right to protest from your perspective?

I've been saying for some years now that we are living in a democratic dictatorship. [...] Sometimes there are situations where we feel that our rights are being rolled back. Because if we have rights and they're written in the Constitution, then why can't we exercise them? Why can't we use our rights? [...] We have various legal actions, and when on the ground we see that things aren't being done properly, we go out there, we block the machines, we reach out to the media, and give voice to our dissatisfaction.

What role does the State have in your struggle?

A: The State acts as the devil's advocate, [...] always standing with the company, always calculating the company's interests, not the people's.

And the police? Do you feel that the police protect you or repress you?

A: Many times we feel the police have two sets of standards: one for us and one for the company. We feel intimidated, not because they're aggressive, but because of their words. Things like: "You can't be here. If the government wants it, the government orders it. And who's going to pay for the machines being stopped?" There's a clear difference: when we call them and complain, they don't do anything. When it's the company, we're told to leave. We feel we are not treated equally.

And in the midst of this already long struggle, how do you take care of each other?

A: Sometimes we don't have much time to take care of ourselves, because we spend days in the mountains [blocking the machines], one after the other. And when we get home, we all have our work—most of us are farmers - we have to take care of our chores. But still, there's affection, friendship, and unity, born from good neighborly relationships and companionship. For example, when we spent seven months in the mountains blocking a machine, [...] people took shifts. There was cooperation. Also during meetings, [...] people come, share their worries, and just being together helps. One day, the GNR threatened arrests if we didn't leave the land. Honestly, that day we were ready to all get arrested. We wanted to see what they would do. We were 25 people. That was very good, very important—because people felt support, felt cared for, and didn't feel so intimidated, you know? One of their tactics is to isolate people, to speak with them privately. So, above all, there's companionship. And it's true that if it were only one or two of us, we would've already given up. But together - and with support from outside - we endure.

Brussels Disability protest 5th of May

On Independent Living Day, we joined a protest in Brussels against the Brussels Region's decision to abolish the Personal Assistance Budget. Organized by ENIL (European Network on Independent Living), the demonstration called for the protection of this important support, which enables disabled people to live independently by funding personal care tailored to their needs.

Interview protest organiser

Why is it important for you to defend the right to protest?

T: I think it's an essential element of advocacy. I practice human rights advocacy, and protest is a way to raise awareness and show our discontent with policies. It's also part of being in community, showing that we are not alone in our fights. We are not silent, and we are not invisible.

What role does the State play in this process?

T: States are responsible for protecting, respecting, and fulfilling human rights. This means making sure rights are respected, not breached, and providing the means to achieve them. In our case, that includes personal assistance to disabled people and services in the community, and making sure no public or private money goes into segregation.

How do you care for each other through this struggle?

T: Peer support is super important. Too often, care is structured as able-bodied people caring for disabled people. But we want disabled people also taking care of each other, reflecting on our similar struggles, while non-disabled people act as allies, not carers, who push and empower us.

Do you feel connected to other struggles?

T: Yes, though sometimes we struggle to connect. Of course, people have multiple identities and face multiple oppressions, but we need a stronger intersectional approach. We stand with the feminist, LGBT, and anti-racist movements, because we're all affected by the same oppressive system.

How can protests be safer and more accessible?

T: People with disabilities often struggle to participate. The built environment is a barrier: trains without accessibility, metros without elevators, overwhelming sounds for autistic or neurodivergent people. We need to make sure everyone can take part. In France, sometimes non-disabled people even protest in representation of disabled people. It's not ideal, but it's one alternative.

Interview Disability activist

Why is it important to defend the right to protest?

Because without protest, policymakers won't hear our message. It's very hard to get a place at the discussion table. Protest also raises public awareness of things going completely wrong.

What strategies do you use?

As a wheelchair user, often we block passage together with others—making ourselves visible. We must be strong, loud, and visible. Diplomatic emails or letters don't reach the city. But when we protest, suddenly we exist.

What role does the State play?

The State is a tool to implement. We're not asking heaven on earth—just logical things to rearrange equality in society. But even between our own human rights, we are discriminated against. We are the biggest minority in society, yet still treated as a burden, as charity. Protest is the only thing we have to impose ourselves.

How do you take care of each other?

We use peer support before, during, and after protests. We should not sacrifice our health or mental well-being, even though obstacles push us to protest. People say: "Oh, it's brave, it's beautiful." But we are here because we have no other alternative. Change is slow, so we must take care of each other, slowly but surely.

Do you feel connected to other struggles?

It's sometimes difficult. For example, the LGBT community succeeded much better because many are well-educated, well-structured, in high positions in society. We, disabled people, are still seen as a cost, as a medical or charity issue. We need to break several barriers at once, and at the same time, emancipate persons with disabilities to know their rights and be assertive.

How can protests be made safer and more accessible?

By ensuring diversity and anticipating risks. Have plan B and plan C. Create neutral zones so everyone feels safe. Set up security roles: if someone doesn't feel comfortable with police, they can step back; if someone doesn't want to be filmed, give a signal, we'll cover them. It's about dialogue. Before the protest, delegate people as references so everyone knows where to turn.

Fonts by Gender Fail Press: Act Up Protest font, Say Their Name, Mother Nature is a Lesbian
ShiftSlow collective // IG @shift_slow_collective